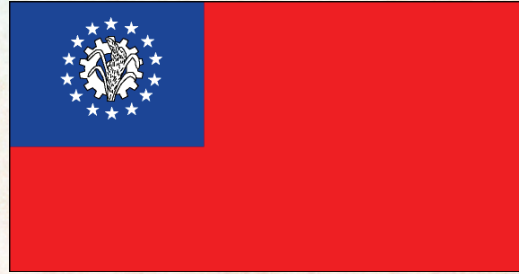


WORLD Refugee Day



Burma (Myanmar)*

Causes of the Refugee Problem

Burma is an ethnically and linguistically diverse country that is home to the Karen, Chin, Kachin, and Mon ethnic minorities.

The Burmese military seized state power during a coup in 1962 and subsequently abolished the Union of Burma Constitution. Since March 1996, the Burmese military regime has forcibly relocated thousands of villages populated by ethnic minorities. Over 300,000 people have been ordered to move at gunpoint to strategic relocation sites. Resistance movements sprang up all over the country and as a result, the government moved to tighten control. The strategy employed by the Burmese Army to crush the resistance has been called the "Four Cuts Operation." It is aimed at intercepting the food, funding communication and recruits provided by local villagers to the resistance armies. This involved forcing whole village tracts to move to designated strategic sites, which could be guarded. Large areas of Burma, particularly in rural areas, have been repeatedly disrupted in this way.

Need for Resettlement

For over 40 years, the people of Burma have been subject to a succession of dictatorships. Anybody who dares speak up against the ruling junta can be detained, tortured, or killed. There is virtually no freedom of speech. There have been violent crack-downs on the peaceful protests led by Buddhist clergy. Evidence has been suggesting that the Burmese regime has marked certain ethnic minorities such as the Karen for extermination or "Burmisation." The displaced Burmese populations living in Thailand and Malaysia are unable to legally work in either country. Neither government offers recognition of this population as refugees or provides protection awarded to refugee populations. Unable to return to Burma or integrate in their country of refuge, the Burmese people are left to seek resettlement in foreign countries.



Quick Facts

Number of Burmese Refugee Camps: 9 government run camps in Thailand
Burmese refugees in Thailand: 112,000 registered refugees, an estimated 50,000 more are unregistered
Burmese refugees in Malaysia: 81,000

**The country's official name, Union of Myanmar, is not recognized by the United States, United Kingdom, and many other countries. The name was changed to Union of Myanmar in 1989 by the military dictatorship. Most ethnic minority and refugee groups still refer to their homeland as Burma.*